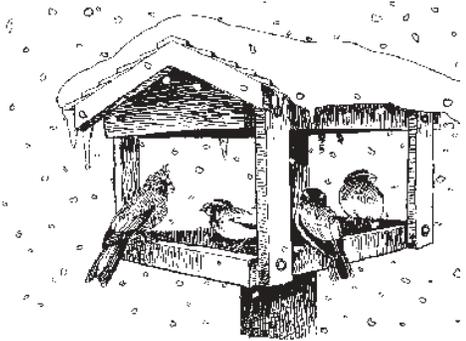


# Habitat Components

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**W**ildlife will benefit from a well thought out backyard plan. To understand the needs of wildlife you must first learn about their habitat requirements. Habitat is the area in which a species lives. Simply stated, habitat is made up of four basic requirements for survival: sufficient space, food, water and shelter.

The specifics of these requirements varies greatly from one species to another, even from one season to the next. Generally, the larger and more diverse an area is, the more species of wildlife it can support. If your backyard is limited in size or in the variety of habitat components it provides, most wildlife will be transients, using your yard for specific needs and then moving on.



**Space** is a basic requirement for all wildlife to forage, seek cover, protect their young, and have access to diverse habitat conditions. Your backyard habitat can provide food, water and shelter even though you may have limited space.

**Food** supplies and individual preferences change seasonally, causing many kinds of wildlife to move from one area to another. You can provide food supplies by planting known native and preferred food plants that produce seeds and fruits, developing feeding stations, or attracting other food sources, such as insects, into your yard.

**Water** is the need most overlooked and underestimated when landscaping for wildlife. It is important for bathing and drinking by all animals, all year round.

**Shelter** such as protection from severe weather, safe resting, roosting and hiding areas, and ample space to successfully rear young are all needed by wildlife. Although we may not be able to provide all of these in the typical backyard with limited space, we can improve shelter availability for wildlife considerably.

Given enough space, a well conceived backyard habitat should include most of the following vegetative and physical components:

## Vegetative Components

- Conifers provide good year-round cover as well as food. They also act as windbreaks to shelter homes and wildlife from the frigid winter winds and parching summers.
- Grasses and wildflowers provide food, cover and nesting sites for songbirds, ducks, voles, chipmunks and woodchucks. Insects that provide food for a host of vertebrates also thrive in unmowed herbaceous vegetation.



Flora of WV

- Vines should be an integral part of any wildlife landscape, providing excellent cover for nesting birds as well as nectar for hummingbirds and butterflies. (Examples: grapes, trumpet-creeper, Virginia creeper, morning glory)
- Nectar sources provide food for butterflies, moths, bees, hummingbirds and orioles. The fragrant native flowers also attract insects that would provide food for other songbirds.
- Fruiting plants make up an important component of the diet of many songbirds, turtles and small mammals. Various plants fruit at different times throughout the growing season, providing food all season long.

• Mast plants, mostly tree species, provide hard fruits (hickory nuts, beechnuts, acorns) that furnish fat and energy to animals. Many mast-producing species produce nuts in cycles so it is important to have an array of species on your property.

• Refer to the *Native Vegetation* section to learn why it is important to utilize plants native to your area.

## Physical Components

• Water is necessary for drinking, bathing and reproduction as well as keeping cool. Ponds are a great way to attract a variety of wildlife.

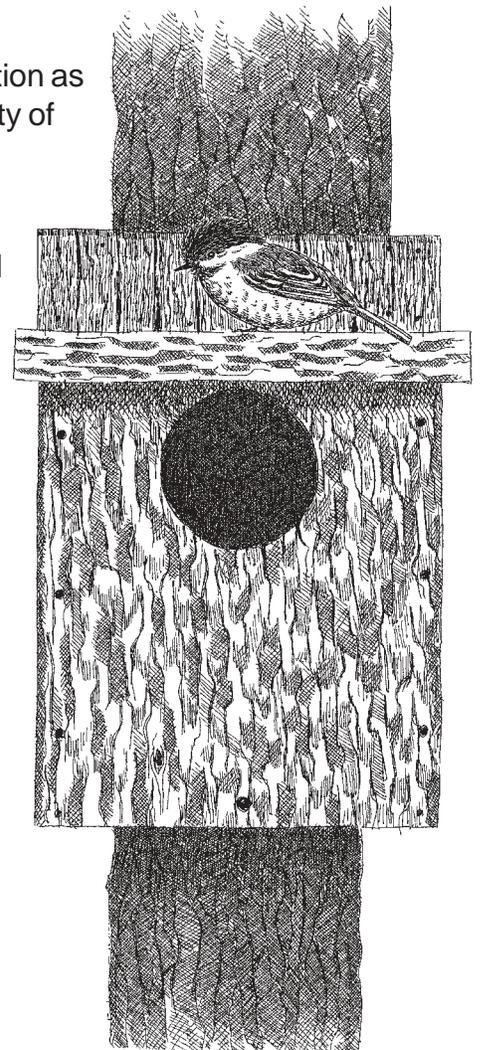
• Snags (dead standing trees) with cavities provide nesting and shelter for flying squirrels, other mammals and cavity-nesting birds. Their cool, sheltered microenvironments foster unique communities of interrelated animals. Some amphibians and reptiles will even use cavities for cover.

• Stumps and snags without cavities allow woodpeckers to excavate nesting cavities, provide food for insect eaters and provide hunting perches for raptors and singing perches for songbirds.

• Nest boxes are artificial cavities which can benefit cavity-nesting species and attract them to your backyard. Proper box types and proper placement of the boxes are extremely important. Nest boxes and feeders should be used to supplement natural sources.

A yard with ample mature cavity trees, fruiting plants and seed-producing plants should be hospitable to many species without the use of nest boxes and feeders.

- Brush piles give small mammals and birds safety



from predators and protection from the weather. Use tree trimmings, old Christmas trees and leaves. Hide your brush pile behind a garage or shed and use vines to cover the pile. They provide shelter and protection for a variety of animals including chipmunks, cottontails, garter snakes and turtles.

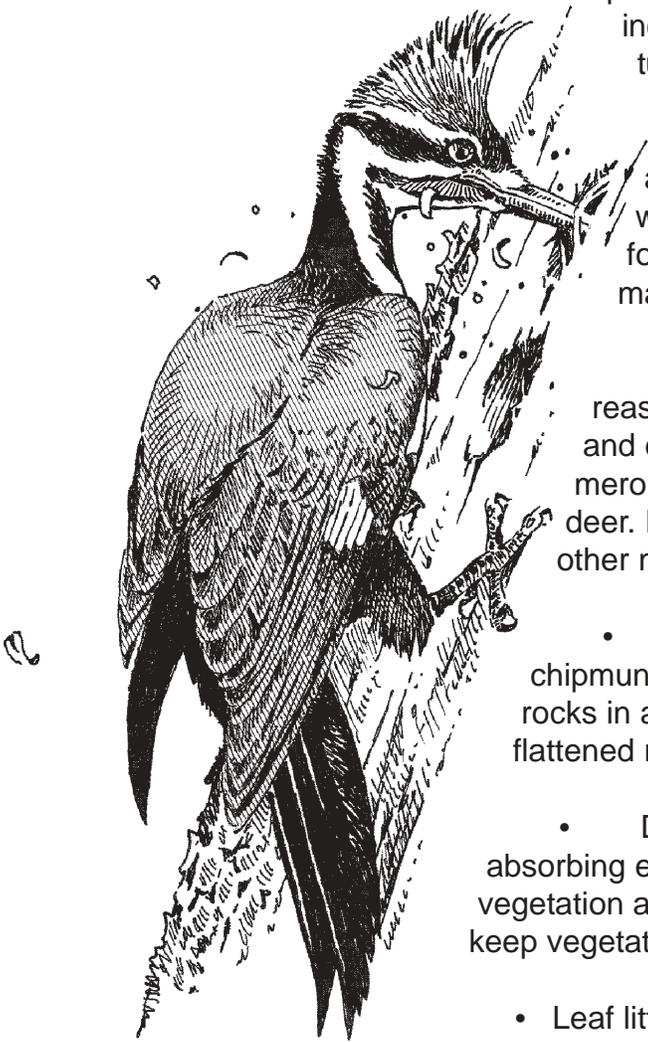
- Fallen logs give storage space to squirrels and deer mice, as well as absorb and retain water while decaying which creates a microenvironment for salamanders, snails, insects, millipedes, and many other critters.

- Grit, dust and salt are important for different reasons. Grit is used by many birds for grinding food, and dust is used for sanitizing. Salt is craved by numerous species of mammals including white-tailed deer. Its use in your backyard may help keep deer and other mammals off salt-covered highways.

- Rock piles and rock walls provide shelter for chipmunks, rabbits, lizards, snakes and frogs. Lay large rocks in a spoke wheel pattern to form a base, adding flattened rocks to the top.

- Dust baths help birds maintain their feathers by absorbing excess oil and discouraging parasites. Scrape vegetation away from a sunny area about 3'x3' square and keep vegetation away to create your dust bath.

- Leaf litter under your trees and shrubs creates habitat for insects eaten by towhees, wrens, lizards, toads and frogs.



## Danger! Windows Ahead

Windows can be deadly for birds. Either move your feeders and bird baths within a foot or two from windows so that birds cannot build up lethal momentum if they do hit the window, or put feeders and baths more than 25 feet away. You can also cover the surface of windows with objects less than 4" apart (strips of cardboard or sticks) or hang paper plates, mobiles, pine cones or hawk silhouettes.

